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CHAPTER X

'PEOPLE'S DEMOCRACIES'— DICTATORSHIP OVER THE PEOPLE

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642 ALL THE COUNTRIES of 'People's Democracy' have very fine constitutions. Article 2, of the 'Constitution of the People's Republic of Bulgaria' (approved by the Grand National Assembly on December 4th, 1947) states:

'In the People's Republic of Bulgaria all power emanates from the people and belongs to the people.

'This power is exercised through freely elected representative organs and through referenda.

'All representative organs of the State power are elected by the citizens, by a general, direct, and secret ballot.'

Article 88 states: 'The citizens of the People's Republic are guaranteed freedom of the press, of speech, of assembly, of meetings and demonstrations'. Articles similar to these two appear in all the constitutions of the 'People's Democracies.'*

How do these fine institutions work in practice? What is the actual interpretation of 'free elections' or 'freedom of the press, speech, of assembly, of meetings and demonstrations'?

'Free Elections'

● 666 Formally all the governments of Eastern Europe are responsible to parliaments, which are made up of representatives of the people democratically elected. In all elections the overwhelming majority of the electorate is stated to have voted and an overwhelming majority of the votes to have been given for the existing M.P's. In the Rumanian general elections of March 28th, 1948, 91 per cent of the electorate voted, of whom 90.8 per cent voted for the list of candidates supporting the present government. In the Czechoslovakian elections of May 30th, 1948, the corresponding figures were 90 per cent

*For a comparative analysis of the Constitutions of the 'People's Democracies' see Samuel L. Sharp, *New Constitutions in the Soviet Sphere*, Washington, 1948, and A. Gyorgy, *Governments of Danubian Europe*, New York, 1949.

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and 89.2 per cent; in the Hungarian elections of May 15th, 1949, 94.6 per cent and 95.6 per cent; in Bulgaria (December 18th, 1949) 98.89 per cent and 97.66 per cent; and in Yugoslavia (March 26th, 1950) 93.23 per cent and 94.2 per cent.* 666 ●

But the impression of such solid support for the governments is very much weakened by the fact that in all the elections there was only one list of candidates.

The Communist leaders tried to hide their intention of establishing such a system of 'elections,' which is a manifest negation of democratic procedure. For instance, Marshal Tito, the first to establish this system, said in an interview with *The Times* correspondent on November 13th, 1945: 'I should like to see our opposition leading a full political life. I certainly expect an opposition to crystallize out of the many parties which go to form the National Front in Parliament, for we shall have to settle many controversial issues.' At that time Tito insisted on the right to put up a number of electoral lists. The Communist leaders in the last country to adopt the system—Czechoslovakia—were also vehement in denying their intentions. Thus the *Daily Worker* of 24th March, 1948—two months before the one-list elections—said: 'It was confirmed yesterday that the Communists will go to the polls as an independent party. There will be lists of candidates from the four Czech and three Slovak parties.'

Lest the existence of only one list of candidates should be insufficient guarantee of the desired electoral victory, other precautions were taken. In some countries the secret ballot was abolished. In Czechoslovakia, for instance, where the secret ballot had previously obtained, it was announced before the elections of May, 1948, that no voter was to be compelled to observe secrecy when casting his vote. Nosek, the Communist Minister of the Interior, declared a few days before the elections: 'There can be no grounds for disapporoval if a voter of his own free will does not exercise the right to a secret vote

*As far as we know no candidate in any of the 'People's Democracies' polled more than 100 per cent. Stalin is the only one who can record such a 'miracle'. In the elections to the local Soviets that took place on 21st December, 1947, the constituency that 'elected' Stalin to the Moscow Soviet had 1,617 voters, but Stalin polled 2,122 votes. *Pravda* next day explained this extraordinary phenomenon thus: 'The extra ballot-papers were put into the urns by citizens of neighbouring constituencies anxious to seize the opportunity to express their gratitude to their leader.'

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666 but votes openly'. The Communist Party followed this up by declaring that only reactionaries were ashamed of their policy and would vote secretly. At the polling booths a voter had to show his identification papers and state whether he wished to cast his ballot paper into the ballot boxes exposed to public view or into boxes in a secret booth. Even if he was bold enough to choose the latter course his ordeal was still not at an end. Two ballot papers, one with the government list of candidates *printed on both sides*, the other a blank slip, were issued to him, and after throwing one of them into the secret ballot box, he had to throw the discarded one into a waste paper basket more or less in full view of the election officers.

[687] If the elector wished to show his disapproval of the government not by voting against it—a path fraught with dangers—but simply by abstaining, he could do so only if he were prepared to pay the penalty the law demands of all who do not vote—imprisonment for a month and a fine of 10 thousand crowns (£50).

Even if the elector was bold enough to vote against the government list, what assurance had he that his vote would be counted, as the only people on the electoral commissions are those who support the official list? When there is only one list of candidates, and when voting is open and counting secret instead of the other way about, the official list cannot possibly lose. Indeed in all the general elections that have taken place since 1948 in the 'People's Democracies' there has not been a *single* case of an official candidate not being elected.

Indirect testimony to the faking of the elections is given by the following fact. In all the Constitutions of the 'People's Democracies', the electoral laws declare the right of a very small group of electors to put up a list of candidates, or a single candidate, if they wish. In Bulgaria every group of *ten* citizens is allowed to do so, in Yugoslavia every group of a hundred, and so on. But although this fine democratic law exists, and although it was stated that thousands voted against the Government (for example, in Bulgaria, in the elections of December, 1949, 109,983 blank or invalid votes were cast and in Yugoslavia in March, 1950, 613,125 voted against the Government) not one case is recorded of a group of ten or a hundred citizens putting up any candidate against the official one.

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were by far the most important; the increase of educational opportunities and general culture; and the development of the economy through agricultural improvement and the expansion of industry and trade.

Political freedom in Eastern Europe before the First World War ranged in degree from negligible rights, as those of the Slovaks in Hungary or of the Poles in Russia, to independent states with constitutions of strongly democratic tendencies, as in certain countries of Southeastern Europe. The latter had been influenced by Western models, and made provision for parliamentary government based on wide suffrage. The constitutions of Serbia, Rumania, and Bulgaria, drafted in the latter half of the nineteenth century by native statesmen experienced in the ways of Western constitutionalism, were founded on a genuine faith in democracy. It is true that royal or ministerial authoritarianism and resort to rough methods were not uncommon in these countries, yet the social egalitarianism already prevailing in Serbia and Bulgaria was a strong force for democracy in these countries. Although illiteracy and political inexperience remained a serious obstacle to orderly government, the generation before the First World War offers significant examples of governments being changed by orderly democratic procedures. Illustrative of the difficulties under which popular elections with universal male suffrage were conducted is the fact that in the Bulgarian election of 1880 only 32 per cent of those eligible to vote cast their ballots, in contrast to about 80 per cent in France and Belgium and 60 per cent in Germany and Italy in the period 1875-80.

Hungary had a longer tradition of constitutional government than did the Balkan states and after 1867 was in most respects an independent state, but its social structure was more conservative and its desire for political democracy less evident. Moreover, the Magyar achievement of political autonomy was marred by the oppressive treatment of the

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665 *Roads*, the Communist organ published after the war in Warsaw, reported that before the Second World War the Communist Party of Poland never had more than 20,000 members. In the elections for the Seym (the Polish parliament) in 1922, the Communists netted 130,000 votes or 1 per cent of the votes cast. In 1926 the Communists together with their various affiliates had 23 deputies. At the peak of the economic crisis in 1928 the Communists received 829,000 out of 11,758,000 votes, or about 7 per cent of the total number of votes cast. The Communist bloc, by 1946, consisted of the Polish Workers' Party (Communists), the Polish Socialist Party, the Democratic Party, and the Labor Party. This bloc, it was secretly reported to Stalin, did not receive more than 16 per cent of the votes either in the referendum of 1946 or in the elections of 1947, despite the presence of the Red Army in Poland and the use of terror and violence. These few samplings from the history of the Communist Party of Poland show how Communist tactics which required actions against the interests of the country and its various social classes and which contradicted the ideological theories of communism prevented a wider development of the Communist Party.

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Czechoslovakia had a genuine democratic system before the war and gave the Communist Party full freedom of action. In the parliamentary election of 1925 the Communists gained 41 seats and in the elections of 1934 and 1935 they received only 30 seats out of the total number of 300 in the parliament. After the war, in May 1946, the Czech Communist Party won 31 per cent of the total Czechoslovakian vote and elected 93 deputies out of the total number of 300. In the same election the Slovak Communist Party, in a region that had already experienced the "blessing" of liberation by the Red Army, won a much smaller percentage of the total vote in proportion to the population.

In Bulgaria, before the Second World War, the number of

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Communist deputies ranged from 15 to 48 out of a total 665
number of 274 members of parliament. The highest Communist representation was gained directly after the First World War and the lowest, consisting of only 15 deputies, occurred under Stambolisky; in 1927 the Communists had 33 deputies. The phenomenon of the political opportunism of all Communist parties during the war, that is, their sudden switch to the support of Hitler, was particularly pronounced in Bulgaria. The political report of the Fifth Congress of the Bulgarian Communist Party of December 1948 shows that in August of 1944, that is, at the moment of the change of government toward the end of the Second World War, the Communist Party had only 25,000 members.

In Hungary, since the experience with Béla Kun in 1919, [666] •
the influence of communism has been very weak. It is significant that after the Second World War in the elections of 1945 the Hungarian Communists received only 17 per cent of the vote, despite the Russian methods of persuasion. Even in the elections of 1947 the Communists won only 18 per cent of the vote for their own party.

According to the reports of Anna Pauker and other Communist leaders, the Rumanian Communist Party had less than 2,000 members in the years 1944-45.

The Communists could never expect to assume power in any of the above mentioned countries by parliamentary and democratic methods because the Communist parties, even in the most favorable periods, had the support of only 5 to 15 per cent of the people. Neither were the Communists able to establish police systems in these countries in the period immediately following the Second World War. Therefore, they promulgated "People's Democracies." They organized within the individual countries by stealing the traditional names of prewar political parties, by filling the top posts in these parties with their own agents, and by creating fictitious coalitions of parties. The Communists had in their

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641 of the population of the given country. Finally, even the
665 internal structure of the Communist Party is dictatorial. The delegates of the local organizations accept only the projects and decisions of the party elite or of the chief dictator.

641 The Rumanian constitution, just like the others, appears to guarantee freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom of public processions and manifestations. Article 85 states that "These rights are ensured by placing at the disposal of the working masses and their organizations printing presses, stocks of paper, public buildings, the streets, communications facilities and other material requisites." In practice, the printing presses, paper mills, public buildings, radio, and so forth are owned by the state and are completely controlled by the leadership of the Communist Party. Even religious processions and manifestations require the consent of the state.

641 In theory, under the Communist system, every citizen over
666 eighteen years of age has the right to vote. In practice, the elections are a tragic farce. They do not mean the right to select a candidate, to participate in the adoption of a party program, or even to defend social or national interests. They signify a compulsion to vote for one's hated enemies. The elector is forced to march to the polls to the accompaniment of music played by his foes while pain wrenches his heart and his fists clench in hatred and anger. The official results of the elections always show that the candidates of the Communist Party have received 99 per cent of the votes.

602 Does the administration of justice stand guard over civil
641 liberties? No, it definitely does not, either in practice or in theory. The constitutions of the People's Republics have clear provisions in this respect. Article 41 of the Hungarian constitution states: "The courts shall punish the enemies of the people, defend and secure the political, economic and social order of the People's Democracy . . . they shall edu-